

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-07 EUR-12 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

/070 W

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R 021535Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1633

INFO USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 4398

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, EG

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN PRESS CHANGES: PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

REF: CAIRO 4285

1. JUDGING FROM TONE AND STYLE OF DAILIES FOLLOWING MARCH 28 DECREE REFORMING PRESS ESTABLISHMENTS (REFTEL), IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THERE ARE NO SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES AT EITHER GUMHURIYYA OR AKHBAR. WHILE AMINS ARE NO LONGER AT HELM OF AKHBAR, NEW CHAIRMAN MUSA SABRI IS LIKE-MINDED AND NEW MANAGING EDITOR AHMAD ZAYN IS HARD-WORKING PROFESSIONAL JOURNALIST WITH NO APPARENT IDEAS FIXES (HIS TORRENT OF ANTI-BA'ATH ARTICLES ARE WRITTEN ON INSTRUCTIONS), AND ALI AMIN, DESPARATELY ILL AS HE IS, APPARENTLY INTENDS TO WRITE MORE OR LESS REGULARLY IN HIS USUAL STRAIGHTFORWARD ANTI-SOVIET MANNER. AMIN BROTHERS AND GALAL HAMMAMSI (SHOM SADAT ATTACKED BY NAME FOR UNDOCUMENTED ATTACKS ON CORRUPTION IN

NASSER'S FAMILY) REMAIN ON AKHBAR ROOLS AS CONTRIBUTING EDITORS. ANTI-SOVIETISM IS A LA MODE FOLLOWING TOUGH USSR REPLY TO TREATY ABROGATION, SO AKHBAR'S EDITORIAL STAFF IS FEELING ITS OATS.

2. IF WE ARE TO SEE IMPORTANT CHANGES, THESE WILL BE AT AHRAH. FEELING IS THAT YUSUF SIBA'I, WHO HAS SERVED WHATEVER POWERS-
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MAY-BE WELL AS HATCHET MAN, MAY LEAVE HIS CHIEF EDITOR ALI HAMDI AL-GAMMAL TO GET ON WITH JOB OF GETTING PAPER

OUT AND THAT AHRAH MAY REVERT TO ITS TRADITIONAL ROLE AS "MOST" SEMI-OFFICIAL OF THREE DAILIES. THERE IS UNEASINESS, HOWEVER, AT DAR AL-AHRAH THAT SIBAT'S PRESENCE MAY FORESHADOW CRACK DOWN ON THE STILL STRONGLY PRO-HAYKAL PROCLIVITIES OF THE STAFF. AUTHORITY PERSUASION, NOT ASU EXPULSION, LIKELY TO BE SIBAT'S TECHNIQUE. THERE ARE SEVERAL AHRAH EMPLOYEES IN IMPORTANT POSITIONS WHO RETAIN CLOSE TIES TO HAYKAL INCLUDING LOCAL NEWS EDITOR AND ARAB AFFAIRS EDITOR.

3. AS NOTED REFTTEL, IT IS EXPECTED GOE WILL EXERCISE GREATER CONTROL THAN IN RECENT PAST OVER PRESS AFFAIRS. THUS, AS AKHBAR STAFFER HAMMAMSI POINTED OUT TO EMBOFF, PRESS CHANGES WERE ISSUED WITHOUT CONSULTATION WITH HIGHER PRESS COUNCIL, EVEN THOUGH SADAT HAD HIMSELF ANNOUNCED MARCH 14 THAT PRESS REORGANIZATION SHOULD BE INITIALLY HANDLED THROUGH HPC. AS YET, HOWEVER, WE SEE NO OBVIOUS MANAGEMENT OF THE NEWS, THOUGH NEWSPAPERS' EDITORIAL POLICY CONTINUES, AS USUAL, TO BE TRANSPARENTLY INSPIRED BY GOE.

4. PRESIDENT DECLARED IN MARCH 27 SPEECH THAT PRESS SYNDICATE DEMANDS FOR HIGHER WAGES WERE UNPATRIOTICALLY SELFISH SYNDICATE IS LIKELY REMAIN UNIMPORTANT FACTOR IN PRESS AFFAIRS. SYNDICATE, MEMBERS WHO HAD ANNOUNCED INTENTION REMAIN IN SESSION UNTIL ASU ACTED TO INCREASE SALARIES, DID NOT DO SO, AND ONE MEMBER SENT CABLE OF SUPPORT TO SADAT IN NAME WHOLE SYNDICATE EMPHASIZING "INTERESTS OF EGYPT SURPASS EVERY OTHER CONSIDERATION."

5. ONLY MILDLY INTERESTING EVENT IN PRESS FIELD SINCE REORGANIZATION WAS WITHDRAWAL LICENSE TO PUBLISH FROM LEFTIST WEEKLY SAWT AL-TULLAB, WHICH HAD RUN TWO-PART INTERVIEW WITH HAYKAL CHARACTERIZED BY FRANK CRITICISM OF SADAT AND HIS POLICIES. REFLECTING WHAT OBSERVERS SEE AS CONTINUING ASTONISHING APATHY ON CAMPUSES, THIS DECISION WAS ACCEPTED VIRTUALLY WITHOUT A MURMUR, EVEN AT FACULTY OF ENGINEERING (WHICH USED TO PUBLISH THE PAPER), ONE OF TRADITIONALLY MOST SHORT-TEMPERED OF CAIRO UNIVERSITY FACULTIES. SAWT AL-TULLAB IS NOT A PRESS SYNDICATE MEMBER IN ANY CASE AND NEW MININFO EMPHASIZED PUBLICLY THAT WHEN "SUITABLE" EDITOR IN CHIEF CAN BE FOUND, PUBLICATION MAY RESUME. HE CLAIMED REQUEST TO CANCEL LICENSE WAS NOT INITIATED BY GOE, BUT CAME FROM
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ENGINEERING FACULTY'S STUDENT UNION.

6. THAT GOE INTENDS EXTEND GREATER INFLUENCE OVER PRESS AFFAIR SBY FIRMER GUIDANCE RATHER THAN WHOLESAL DISCHARGE OF ANTI-SADATIST ELEMENTS IS PERHAPS BEST SHOWN BY FACT THAT MOST MARXIST OF ALL EGYPTIAN PUBLICATIONS, MONTHLY AL-TALI'A, CONTINUES TO BE RUN BY LUTFI AL-KHULI, ASSISTED BY MARXIST PEOPLES ASSEMBLY MEMBER ABU SAYF YUSUF, WHO RECENTLY GAINED LOCAL NOTORIETY BY BEING ONE OF TWO ASSEMBLY MEMBERS WHO VOTED AGAINST ABROGATION GOE-USSR TREATY.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REORGANIZATIONS, THE PRESS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: RowellE0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976CAIRO04398
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760125-0851
From: CAIRO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t197604105/aaaadmdg.tel
Line Count: 116
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 CAIRO 4285
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: RowellE0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <21 OCT 2004 by RowellE0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EGYPTIAN PRESS CHANGES: PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT
TAGS: PINT, SOPN, EG
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006